

My name is Victor Rendon and I'm a longtime employee of Trinity Services Group — I started with the company 33 years ago. To put that in perspective, back then there was no Internet, no cell service, and definitely no Facebook.

I worked my way up the ladder in the food business, mostly in prison facilities, across three decades. One of the reasons I've remained in the industry and working for Trinity is because of the tremendous pride and sense of teamwork I feel. Some might question how much pride can be derived from serving meals to people who committed crimes, but that is not how I think about it.

I currently oversee the food service in ten Arizona Department of Corrections complexes and 57 kitchens. The food that inmates consume is a huge part of daily prison life. The food must be served on time, and be tasty and nutritious. Our meals are designed by licensed dieticians to meet stringent nutritional requirements. A little but largely unknown fact: we check the temperature of the food *three times* during the meal, in the beginning, the middle, and the end. A well-fed and happy inmate improves the atmosphere, security, health, and well-being of a prisoner, along with the people who work in a prison. From the menu planning, ordering, receiving, prep, and serving of the meal — it's something that requires more thoughtfulness and caring than most people would ever imagine.

We serve Trinity employees, corrections officers, and prison officials the same exact meals we serve the inmates. There is no set of pots and pans or ingredients for one group or another (except in the case of special diets). In Arizona, around two-thousand inmates are trained in the food prep and service of the meals. They too feel pride in their work and the finished product — just imagine the reception they would get from their fellow inmates if they served an under-cooked or tasteless meal.

It's for these reasons and a multitude of others that the recent story in the press about boxes labeled "not for human consumption" is so upsetting and demoralizing to me and the roughly six-thousand hard-working men and women who make up our organization. We do not and have never served expired food. The process of receiving shipments involves many steps, including a sight inspection of the product and dates, and we also take temperatures of products during deliveries. If something looks as though it might have been packed wrong, or if it does not smell right, we send it back to the vendor right away.

In my kitchens, we are always preaching to each other that you are only as good as your last meal. We serve the best quality food that we possibly can. Again, well fed, happy inmates are central to the overall security of a prison facility. That's why I was so deeply disappointed to read erroneous stories about meals being thrown together without care. My own experience in the food service business isn't flashy or necessarily worthy of bragging about on social media but it is something I am enormously proud of, and it is why I love and respect the food service business and the men and women who make it what it is every single day.

*Victor Rendon is a Regional Vice President of Trinity Services Group in Arizona.*